

**BOISE DISTRICT (BD) BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)**

BLM Boise District Office

Boise, Idaho

April 19, 2005

Minutes

Council Members Present:

Neil Rimbey, Sandra Mitchell, Don Weilmunster, Donna Griffin, Donna Bennett, Gil Green, Brenda Richards, Ted Howard, Rick Raymondi.

Council Members Absent:

Jon Robison, Robert Baker, Pat Cudmore, Chris Salove, Kenneth Reid and Robert Amadon.

BLM Advisory Present:

Glen Secrist, Boise District Manager; Jerry Taylor, Acting Boise District Manager; MJ Byrne, Public Affairs Specialist and BD RAC Coordinator.

Other BLM Staff Present:

John Hatch, Boise District Administrative Officer; Ron Kay, Owyhee Field Office Manager; Rosey Thomas, Four Rivers Field Office Manager; Mitch Jaurena, Bruneau Field Office Manager; Mike O'Donnell, BD Planning and Environmental Coordinator.

Others: Becky Desmond, notetaker.

Statements attributed to individuals are not direct quotes unless so indicated.

**COUNCIL BUSINESS, GENERAL INFORMATION, AND OPENING
REMARKS:**

Chairman Weilmunster brought the meeting to order, welcoming all. The minutes from the Feb. 2005 meeting were presented and no corrections had been noted. In the absence of a quorum, the minutes were certified by the Chairman as provided for in the Charter (Section 14). Glen Secrist also welcomed all and thanked Jerry Taylor and the rest of his staff for their work and support during his illness and treatment. He also thanked everyone for their greetings and support.

Presentation:

**Idaho's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy--Sarah Bigger, Assoc. Dir.,
Environmental Science and Public Policy Research Institute, BSU.**

Ms. Bigger gave a slide presentation and provided a handout on Idaho's Comprehensive Conservation Strategy. She was hired by The Fish & Game Dept. to help with public outreach and gather feedback on the program. This program originated with the National Conservation and Recovery Act (NCRA). It is a voluntary "blueprint" with a vision to

conserve species with the greatest conservation need. It will encompass federal and state agencies, local governments and private parties. The purpose is to help species BEFORE they are listed under the Endangered Species Act. An example cited was the difference between actions and results for the sage grouse (unlisted) and the bull trout (listed). Public participation is still to come with the draft strategy to be available to the public by July 2005. By September 2005, the State Fish & Game Dept. hopes to submit the final strategy to the USFWS.

ACTION: MJ Byrne requested that any new information be mailed to her for dissemination to the RAC. Also, Ms. Bigger will try to develop a comprehensive list of all agency funding opportunities for habitat projects for which private parties and groups may apply. This list is to be listed on Idaho One Webpage.

Ted Howard and Brenda Richards commented, respectively, on the negative impacts of wind power installations on species conservation and urban growth which fragments the habitat. Ms. Richards said it shouldn't always be left to whatever agricultural community is left to care for the habitat. She added that good rural economies and incentives are the best strategies to keep open space for habitat.

ACTION: Neil Rimbey will provide information to Sarah Bigger from a University of Idaho professor who has done work on the growth patterns in the state.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS AND RELATED ISSUE PRESENTATIONS

Rangeland Standards and Guides, Brenda Richards, Chair.

Presentation:

Drought Conditions, Karl Gebhardt, Hydrologist/Environmental Engineer for the BLM, and Ken Crane, Chair of Idaho's Drought Task Force. Ms. Richards introduced Mr. Gebhardt who presented a slide show and provided a handout on a new range tech model that acts like a "checkbook." This model tracks water entering or leaving the soil. Named "Real-Time Drought Assessment of Rangelands," it was funded through the Science Initiative Program of BLM. Mr. Gebhardt said it should provide a much better estimate of soil moisture conditions in specific areas than does the current drought forecasting. This model allows the user to compare one year to another and will be available in a more user-friendly format.

Ken Crane reviewed the history of the state drought task force, which is made up primarily of land agencies but is open to anyone. The task force's primary focus is to improve communication on drought conditions with the range permittees enabling them to plan ahead and not just react to the drought. Mr. Crane cautioned that conditions vary site by site. Meetings were convened and news bulletins were made available. Mitch Jaurena stated that he has worked closely with Mr. Crane and that the task force's information has been very useful in projecting a cattle turnout strategy for his permittees. Neil Rimbey commented that it seems to tie in closely with Mr. Gebhardt's RAWS project, and that data is much improved over the past ten years. Mr. Gebhardt noted that

the U of I currently has a pasture-availability website and may develop another site for hay.

Discussion followed focusing on the need to educate the public about the origin of reservoirs for irrigation, and to inform recreationists that agriculture is a senior water user to recreation. Sandra Mitchell observed that as Idaho's economy changes from rural to urban, it needs to be recognized that recreation activities contribute more and more to the general economy.

Update on grazing regulations: Brenda Richards said regulations were still not out but should be any day. There is information in the meeting notebook.

Update on Mormon crickets: John Hatch pointed out the BLM News Release in the meeting notebook and reiterated that landowners can request treatment or no treatment. He also referred to a briefing paper in the meeting notebook which mainly discusses crickets, not grasshoppers. The biggest cricket treatment area this year will be in Owyhee County. APHIS is only responsible for treatment on federally managed lands, but private landowners can obtain bait from the Department of Agriculture and it is available now. Brenda Richards mentioned that Owyhee County has formed a specific very organized, committee to address the cricket issue. Glen Secrist emphasized that the Environmental Assessment (EA) this year extends the impact area beyond Mud Flat and makes more, and earlier, treatment possible from APHIS. In answer to Ted Howard's concern regarding the bait's effect on wildlife, Mr. Secrist assured him it is benign if used according to directions and not put into water supplies. Malathion, which could affect animals, is only being used in connection with grasshoppers, and is only applied for crop protection on small areas of land.

Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) and Transportation Management--Sandra Mitchell, Chair.

Presentation:

Idaho OHV Public Outreach Project. Barry Rose, Idaho State Office Public Affairs Specialist. Mr. Rose presented a slide show on the Idaho OHV Public Outreach Project. This is a three-year state and federal collaborative project to promote responsible OHV use. The project recognizes that OHV is a growth sport with resource and safety issues to manage. Its three key messages are: (1) "Don't Travel Cross-Country"; (2) "Use Established/Designated Routes"; and (3) "Follow Safe Riding Practices." He said other states (especially Arizona, Utah, and Colorado) have proven that media campaigns are effective. Idaho's campaign will target men aged 35-54, whose subgroups are hunters in the fall and hobbyists in the spring. Idaho's communication strategy will be a message that empowers rather than commands, uses mass media to raise awareness, and provides details through websites and support groups. The media plan will use radio ads, billboards, and other products such as brochures given out through registration lists.

Discussion followed. Most members liked the positive billboard signs and radio messages. There were suggestions on obtaining private funding. Ted Howard wondered

why there isn't a cap being put on OHV use, and why it was an accepted conclusion that OHV use had to occur. He said the RAC should stay focused on protecting the habitat for its natural inhabitants, not for recreationists who destroy the environment. He is a proponent of penalties and enforcement. A lengthy discussion followed, with most comments supporting the need to do something NOW about the "one activity" that, said Ken Crane, "has the potential to affect everything on the rangeland." Most agreed that the habitat cannot withstand unlimited OHV use. Suggestions to control or restrict OHV use included using the collected recreational fees for law enforcement; turning OHV use into a permit system such as is used for grazing; addressing enforcement through ATV registration fee increases; and being more aggressive in identifying violators.

WORKING LUNCH

Sage Grouse Habitat Management, Rick Raymondi, Chair.

Update on status of Wind Energy Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and an overview of wind energy projects in Idaho. Jack Peterson, ISO Resource Management Specialist, summarized the current status of wind projects in Idaho. He said wind energy is still controversial with regard to sage grouse and raptors even though there currently were only two possible projects on BLM-administered public lands in Idaho. Because the federal production tax credit has been extended, renewable energy is now on an even footing with agriculture in Idaho. Wind energy is being produced for "green credits" in the states whose laws require 10-20% of all energy production must be "green." These states, if they can't produce their own, must buy energy from somewhere else and are willing to pay higher rates.

International companies such as Ridgeline from Ireland, and Renewable Energy Sources (RES) from Scotland are building wind projects on private land in Idaho, as is the multinational Excel Company out of San Francisco. The private land costs less and time from proposal to construction is shortened, due mainly to the fewer environmental requirements that apply to private land. Wind energy projects fall under federal right-of-way protection giving the federal government a financial benefit. The counties and states where the land is actually located may only collect a tax on "real property" improvements.

Mr. Howard commented that, in his opinion, the sage grouse nonlisting was not really done for the sage grouse, but to remove obstacles to projects such as the above.

DISTRICT FIRE MANAGER AND FIELD OFFICE REPORTS

BDO Fire Manager: Andy Delmus, acting FO, reported that his office is focusing on workshops on interagency agreements. His budget is down, and he is still hiring seasonals as well as recruiting for a fire use specialist. The manager position is still vacant but four applicants are being interviewed. Donna Bennett said that Western Watersheds, through Judge Winmill, has stopped some juniper chaining for fuels management and Ron Kay predicted they would do this also in Owyhee County.

However, Mr. Delmus agreed with Brenda Richards that the BLM has produced a more comprehensive NEPA document for Juniper Mountain in Owyhee County.

Bruneau Field Office: Mitch Jaurena outlined the Raft River Powerline Project, which will bring power to the Duck Valley Reservation from CJ Strike Reservoir, assisting economic expansion on the Reservation. The draft EA for this will be out in mid-May. Mr. Jaurena said the Idaho Power will rehabilitate any land cuts and provide for a separate contract to handle invasive weeds. He reported success in his continuing bi-monthly meetings with constituents including permittees, recreationists, and conservationists. Work continues on OHV use and enforcement. Three more seasonals will be hired to work on standards and guides in the allotments.

Four Rivers Field Office: Rosey Thomas began by requesting RAC input on any specific presentations it would like from her in future meetings. Mr. Reimby suggested she work directly with individual RAC subcommittees. Ms. Thomas gave a staffing update and then discussed other office activities. On grazing issues, her allotments fall into ten watershed districts. Two key allotments will be dealt within each two years during a ten-year period. The Northern Idaho-Foothills land exchange is proceeding on track. Several landfill applications are working their way through environmental issues. Energy projects are continuing in Hells Canyon, Swan Falls, and CJ Strike and with the Cambridge-Council-McCall powerline.

There are increasing pressures from private development regarding public land use and she is trying to work with homeowner associations to resolve issues such as OHV use. The Ridge to Rivers Trail System is progressing, as is work on recreation spots along the Payette River, in the Cove Creek area, and along the Wildlife Canyon Scenic Byway.

Work continues on lepidium issues, fuels treatment, and fire mitigation. Ms. Thomas pointed out that the opening of the Foothills Research Center is the culmination of five years' work. The Snake River Birds of Prey RMP is due later this year.

Owyhee Field Office: Ron Kay summarized his office's activities. This included: a staffing update; approval of the Silver City Fuels Project (which will be reviewed by the BLM solicitor); plans for some road clearing and fuels thinning around Juniper Mountain; a small burn in the Castlehead allotment; some juniper removal at Boone Peak; and progress on the biomass generation plant in Emmett (using junipers).

In his range program, Mr. Kay said the Hardtrigger Grazing Allotment decision was issued on March 16 and the final would be out April 22. The Nickle Creek Grazing Allotment hearing was postponed until June. The Juniper Springs and South Mountain decisions would be out next week. In all, 30 allotments were scheduled for completion this year. Scoping letters have been sent to 42 allotments for 2006.

Additional Updates: OHV route identification and designation projects are continuing on the Owyhee Front. SHPO issues in the Elephant Butte and Flint Creek land exchanges

are mostly resolved. BLM Staff seems happy at the new Marsing office and Mr. Kay noted that more people have visited his office in four months than in the five years the office was in Boise.

HOT TOPICS

Boise District Manager: Acting BD Manager Jerry Taylor acknowledged help from his Operations Chief, Jim Johansen, who “knows the issues and the country.” He said Boise District is facing widely scattered demands, from less funding to trying to improve the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to improving interdepartmental cooperation. A NEPA specialist has been hired to help the BLM develop more defensible NEPA documentation. Congress is scrutinizing laws such as Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), the Endangered Species Act, and NEPA to see if the processes can be streamlined. Mr. Taylor stated that all BLM staff were wearing multiple hats and looking for partnership strategies to help cope with less available funding.

At this time Ms. Byrne introduced Sue Mattingly and thanked her for her work in producing the notebook binders and helping with the RAC meeting.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED):

Resource Management Plans--Gil Green, chair.

Presentation and Discussion:

Snake River Birds of Prey NCA Resource Management Plan (RMP). Mike O'Donnell, BD Planning and Environmental Coordinator, and John Sullivan, NCA Manager, gave an update on the RMP. (The plan is in the meeting notebook.) Mr. Sullivan stated that the RMP still lacks a “preferred alternative” and would like RAC to help with that and to continue to assist the BLM in being responsive to the public concerns. Major issues include: increasing population; special status species; military practice; livestock grazing; and landscape-level habitat change. There has been a loss of 300,000 acres of protective shrub due mainly to fires. The RMP concentrates on “desired future conditions” and the alternatives are written to move toward those conditions.

ACTION: Mr. Sullivan and Mr. O'Donnell told the RAC that they would mail a copy of the Draft Alternatives that will be presented in the EIS for the RMP on an electronic disc to any members interested in reviewing them more closely. They expected to have the Draft Alternatives ready within the next few weeks. There was a show of hands of those interested in receiving a Disc copy. RAC Members were asked to provide their comments either back to MJ or directly to Mike O'Donnell or John Sullivan. Their email addresses and phone numbers were given out.

OTHER BUSINESS

MJ asked if there were members interested in floating the Payette River to contact her so that a float trip could be arranged.

She reminded them of the date for the next full meeting, August 23rd. Chairman Don Weilmunster volunteered to host the August meeting in Cascade, and provide members a tour of the Tamarack Resort in the afternoon. RAC Members agreed to Cascade as the location for their August meeting.

Meeting Adjourned

Minutes prepared by:
Becky Desmond, Notetaker

Certified by:

<u>/s/ Gil Green</u>	<u>date 11-17-05</u>	<u>/s/ Jerry Taylor</u>	<u>date 11-18-05</u>
Gil Green,		Jerry Taylor	
Acting RAC Chairman		Acting District Manager, BD	

Appendix (All in meeting notebook unless indicated as a handout.)

1. Idaho's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (Sarah Bigger handouts-2).
2. Real-Time Drought Assessments of Rangelands (Karl Gebhardt handout).
3. Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.
4. US Dept., of Int./BLM drought letter.
5. Rangeland Health issues and management actions paper from BD.
6. US Dept. of Int./BLM drought memo.
7. BLM news release on Mormon cricket and grasshopper suppression.
8. Briefing paper on Mormon cricket and grasshopper suppression.
9. BLM news release on rangeland health assessment.
10. Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area RMP.
11. BLM Vegetation EIS Update, March 2005 (front flap of notebook).